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Interview with an Iranian Anarchist

Northeastern Federation of
Anarcho-Communists

2005

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There is a high probability that the current path of imperialist geo-politics in the Middle East will eventually lead the United States into open conflict with Iran. It is a known fact that the Bush administration has designated the country as belonging to the so-called 'Axis of Evil.' Lesser known are the reports that the U.S. military has been carrying out extensive reconnaissance missions to learn about nuclear, chemical, and missile sites in Iran in preparation for possible air-strikes in the near future. It is fair to say that the primary roadblock to open military aggression up to this point has been due to the "Vietnamization" of the Iraq occupation - the strength and effectiveness of the popular insurgency, coupled with the increasingly negative or critical view of the occupation among broad sections of the international community - which has left

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This interview was done by MaRK, Arya, and Robin. All three
are members or supporters of NEFAC-Boston.

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the United States without a free hand to fully extend its reach over the border into Iran. At least for the time being.

In light of this antagonistic relationship between the United States and Iran, and the potential military consequences on the horizon, basic internationalism compels us toward a better understanding of this country and those who struggle within its borders. Most anarchists in North America have little knowledge of the rich history of leftwing political struggle in Iran, just as we have an embarrassing lack of knowledge about this region of the world in general. So, with that in mind, we have taken the time to interview an Iranian anarchist friend of NEFAC. He obliged us by speaking on his experiences within Iran's revolutionary left, his political evolution towards anarchist-communism, and his socio-political analysis of where the country (and its progressive social movements) is today.

Payman Piedad is the editor of Nakhdar, a Farsi/English-language anarchist-communist magazine with a growing international readership, particularly among Iranian exile communities in North America and Europe. Although he remains very humble of his revolutionary activity over the past three decades, there is a lot to learn from his experiences. We are very proud to have the opportunity to publish some of them here.

NEA: Could you talk about how you first came to revolutionary politics? What influences directly led to your development?

In 1969, when I was only thirteen, the Shah's regime announced that the bus fare was going to be risen from 2 to 5 Rials [at the time 700 Rials was equivalent to US\$1]. That an obvious blow to the average family economy. So a demonstration was organized and I participated in it. Our school a huge contingent-quite spontaneously, i should add-marched down the "24 of Esfand" street, which was a major street then as well as now, breaking every bus's windows that passed by. Riot po-

Subsequently I planted the idea of Nakhdar ["Neither God, Nor state, Nor bosses"] as an independent anarcho-communist publication for the "exiled" community of radical Iranian activists.

At first, like any new project, the magazine was received with jubilation. A few comrades promised their contributions but were waiting for the pilot issue. It was to be a theoretical as well as agitational publication that could be published twice a year. However with the lack of commitment from most of these comrades it has ended up being a yearly. Nevertheless the publication of Nakhdar has been received positively. Mostly from outside of Iran, however there has been some contact from inside Iran as well. Because of the lack of funding Nakhdar now is being sent to only fifteen different Iranian publications in the United States and Europe, as well as roughly fifty individuals internationally. It is also being smuggled into Iran and has a growing readership there.

It's early to say much about the short term success of anarchist ideas within the Iranian Left. We are behind, for example, Turkey in our region of the world. Even though by talking to various comrades and friends on the both side of the world I'm assured of the growth of the anarchism in the long term. The young population of Iran [65% of the population is currently between 18-25], who are politically much more independent thinkers than before, is one of the elements of the future success of this ideology. Of course the dead-end politics of traditional Left (authoritarian/hierarchical) is the main reason to be quite hopeful. As far as the help of the broader anarchist community, I could say either send money (no matter how little) or independently redistribute (photocopy) Nakhdar as widely as you can within the Iranian community in your area. There are Iranian-American youth who are thirsty for anarchist ideas. The road ahead is a long one but the first step has been taken.

come the only cultural "value". And that's where Bush's phony support comes from. But Iran (and most of the Middle East, for now) is not the place to play that game. Because it is a highly important geo-political region (having 70% of the world's oil reserves), the U.S hegemonic power does not want regimes that are not 100% in tune with their political and economic agenda. No wonder the Saudi's primitive monarchism is their favorite regime -- subservient, and loyal to the end.

So there is no dilemma for leftists in the west to support all democratic aspirations by the masses in Iran. Anarchist-communists (and the Left in general) must stand with the Iranian people. But be sure that you are not supporting any imperialist agenda, and that you are firmly behind a radical proletarian agenda. That is enough to scare not only the imperialists, but also their capitalist/authoritarian allies (including the liberals) in Iran to their bones!

NEA: Maybe we should end with a question about the Nakhdar project. Could you talk about magazine, and how it first started? Also, how successful have you been in reaching other Iranians (both inside Iran, and abroad) with anarchist ideas? Is there any way the broader anarchist community could assist you in your efforts?

In the early 1990s, I joined a few Iranian comrades who were publishing a libertarian-Marxist journal called Ghiam ["Insurrection"] in Farsi. It was a collaborative project between a handful of comrades from various tendencies within the Marxist tradition from both Europe and the United States. My collaboration lasted two years since the journal ceased publication. It died because each member was in personal, as well as ideological, crisis. In my case it was the beginning of the end of my Leninist tendencies.

A few years ago I got in touch with some of these old comrades (who were by then in different parts of the world) to initiate a new era of ideological and political activities. I had already started the translation of a few basic anarchist theoretical texts.

lice chased us for two hours. It was amazing. Moreso because it was the first ever "direct action" that I had been involved in.

For the next two years my political participation was, individually, through writing progressive/political poetry on the black board at our school. The reader should know that Persian culture in general, and the political culture in particular, is very poetic. Since we have had thousands of years of authoritarian governments, the political resistance to the status quo, also, has always manifested itself through poetry-metaphorically speaking to the masses and educating them through verses that would be recited in the privacy of everyone's home or in social gatherings. As the saying goes: "Poetry runs through our blood."

NEA: Leading up to the 1979 revolution, what was the left-political atmosphere in Iran like? Were you involved in any revolutionary groups who were active as these events unfolded?

To answer this question properly, a quick review of the twenty-six years prior to the February Revolution of 1979 is in order. On August 18, 1953, when a CIA-organized coup overthrew the first ever Democratic (national bourgeois) government of Doctor Mosadegh in Iran, and brought the lackey Shah back to his throne, it was a huge blow to both the social movements and the revolutionary organizations. However, four years after the return of the Shah to power, on December 7, 1957, when the then U.S. Vice president, Richard Nixon visited Tehran, he was met with a militant student demonstration which threw tomatoes at his motorcade. On that dark day three students were murdered by police. They became martyrs and, consequently, the student movement was born.

Nevertheless, over the next fourteen years the shadow of an imperialist dictatorship through the fascist regime of the Shah was to be predominant. The traitorous leaders of the Tudeh Party (so-called Communist Party, lackeys of our Soviet neighbors to the north) had long left the political scene into exile in

East Germany. The remnants of the National Front (bourgeois party of Doctor Mosadegh) were in total disarray. In short there was no room left for any open political activities or organizations, let alone revolutionary ones. Every sign of discontent would be crushed in its inception, and the only spaces left fairly intact were the Mosques and religious schools. However, during that period the most intellectually advanced of the student movement began a meticulous study of the socio-economic conditions of the country all the way to the post coup d'etat period-i.e. the transformation of Iranian society from a "semi-feudal/semi-colonial" state to a "peripheric" (dependent) capitalist society.

The 1963 "Kennedy-Rostow pact" had done its job: A land reform was imposed and the capitalist social relation was born. Of course, in order to save face, the puppet regime of the Shah pretended it was "his policy" and called it "The White Revolution". To sum up: what the short lived national-bourgeois government of Mosadegh did not get (or better said, was not given) the chance to do was done by the hegemonic imperialist power of the United States.

The above socio-economic analysis and consequent political ramification is summarized in a book called: *Mobarezeye Mosalahane ham Strategy ham Tactic* ["Armed Struggle: As Both a Strategy and Tactic"] by comrade Masoud Ahmadzadeh. Alongside comrade Amir Parviz Poyan's brilliant book *Mobarezeye Mosalahane va Rade Theory Bagha* ["Armed Struggle and the Refutation of the Theory of Survival"] they became the theoretical cornerstone of the revolutionary organization called: "Organization of The Iranian People's Fedaie Guerrilla" (OIPFG). The first public manifestation of this revolutionary organization was on the dawn of "19 Bahman 1349" (February 9, 1971), when a group of thirteen guerrillas attacked the "Siahkal" security forces in the northern region. This announced the birth of the armed struggle.

the imperialist investors (i.e. against the workers in general, in the oil, petro-chemical, and mining sectors in particular). Long hours of work and no attention paid to any of the workers' grievances whatsoever of course benefits the continuing cycle of foreign capital. On the other hand the militarization of civil society is another indirect favor to the domination of the imperialist powers.

NEA: The Bush administration has been paying lip-service to the resistance inside Iran, particularly the student movement. This serves as a dilemma for some of us outside Iran. We want to support the Iranian people's struggle against authoritarianism and capitalism, but we don't want to support imperialism's agenda, particularly when we know it will never let developments take a proletarian course. On the other hand, we want to support the fight against imperialism, but don't want to make the mistake of the many on the Left in the past of supporting lesser authoritarian capitalist states against greater ones. Could you speak a bit about this and what position you feel we here can take to show solidarity without supporting the Islamic republic or playing into imperialism's hand?

Exactly. You do not want to fall into the trap of imperialist rhetoric. We know for a fact that the imperialists and local bourgeoisie never want liberty and freedom for the oppressed masses, nevermind any sort of radical proletarian agenda.

Specifically in the case of Iran, the clear example was during Doctor Mosadeqh's "national bourgeois" government, when there was freedom for political activity. Nevertheless the U.S. (in alliance with the British) preferred an inexperienced monarch who could be manipulated, and later be an excellent puppet like the Shah. So they did away with democracy, and re-installed a fascist dictatorship. That has been the imperialist policy all over the world for over half a century.

Of course times have changed and the imperialists don't mind having regimes that play the game of elections every four years. That way people can be fooled and capital can be-

for radical social change. After all, aren't they (well, not all of them) the ones who give birth to the future revolutionary generations? And aren't they, alongside the anti-patriarchal male activist, who will permanently (re)educate the cause for gender equality? Of course, in addition to the women's movement, we should not forget to mention the gay and lesbian movement -- which is quite in its infancy in the Iranian society.

NEA: Most of the official labor organizations in Iran are State organs. Recently we have witnessed certain sectors of the Iranian proletariat bypass these mediators in favor of acting autonomously. Does this represent a further radicalization of the Iranian working class?

Not necessarily so. As far as I know, on the surface it looks like more radicalization of a certain sector of the proletariat. We can observe daily manifestations of their discontent on a national level: strikes, sit-ins, work stoppages, etc. But so long as the workers do not have the freedom to form their own organizations independent of the State, and subsequently, so long as the "yellow syndicates" [pro-capitalist unions] are predominant, we cannot talk of a successful "bypassing" of these mediators as such.

However, in the current fascistic atmosphere, it is definitely a progressive move forward that cannot be ignored. I hope that more workers join in, especially in the oil sector, so the pressure against the State machinery would facilitate the opening of a space for the advancement of the struggle of the whole society. That is still to be seen.

NEA: Apart from the anti-imperialist language of the Islamic Republic, there continues to be heavy investment in Iran by foreign powers, most significantly the European Union. Could you speak a bit on imperialism's role in the oppression and exploitation of the Iranian people?

You're right. As I mentioned above there has been an increase in the European investment capital in Iran. The Iranian State has made sure that labor laws continue to be in favor of

For the next three years, while finishing high school, I became a staunch supporter of OIPFG. I would distribute -- clandestinely of course -- their leaflets in our school, leaving copies on telephone booths, in sandwich stores, and in a billiards club that I frequented with friends.

Seven months after the arrival of OIPFG on the political stage, another armed group called "Peoples Mojahedin of Iran" with a slightly radical-Islamic tendency (parallel to the "liberation theology" of Latin America) came into existence. However, in subsequent years up until, and after, the February Revolution of 1979 they would go through transformations, which I will not get into here. I left Iran for England in August 1974, and a year later to the United States, to attend university. But I kept my strong allegiance to the armed struggle in Iran for the next eleven years to come.

NEA: Before Khomeni was able to lead the fundamentalist backlash and counter-revolution, what radical gains were made by the Iranian people through the February 1979 events?

Well, unfortunately a majority of the Iranian people got fooled into supporting the so-called referendum that the Khomeni regime had proposed (for the establishment of the Islamic Republic). That was the death sentenced for the organized left.

Nevertheless, before the reorganization of the counter-revolution and its total control over all areas of civil society, every sector of the Iranian society was so thirsty for the so-called new founded "freedom" that they won through their own self-organization. Workers started the Shoura ("soviet" or "council") movement in many factories and even the peasants of the ethnic Turkaman minority (in the Northern region) organized themselves in the same fashion. Women held a major demonstration demanding the right to refuse wearing the religious attire (forceful covering of their body). Students held lively debates and started organizing themselves into various leftwing groupings. The Kurds (the largest and most radical

ethnic minority) immediately created their autonomous zone of control (either through the bourgeois Democratic Party of Kurdistan, or The Komole, a leftwing petite-bourgeois organization with a strong pro-worker/peasant tendency), with their Armed Pishmarge (namely "self-sacrificing guerrilla") ready to shed their blood to defend their territory.

But, again, unfortunately none of the above mass organizations lasted more than a few months. The counter-revolution established their various reactionary armed organizations, namely the Pasdaran Enghelab (so-called "Guardian of the Revolution"), Basij (an armed youth formation), and worst of all The Hezbolaah Party (you could call them the fascist brigade, or "Falange"), and immediately started to smash, break up, and in the case of the Turkamans, carry out vicious executions. In Kurdistan a massive bombardment of their camps took away all the progressive gains that the masses had made for themselves. And, of course, the regime started to create its own "Islamic Shouras", "Islamic women associations" and "Islamic student associations" (which was the extension of the previous pro-Khomeni student organization that was already active prior to his return to Iran). However, what it could never accomplish was to come up with any sham organization which could claim having the interest of any ethnic minority in heart.

NEA: What became of the radical left in Iran following this counter-revolution? Was there an active exile movement abroad? What was your political activity of this period?

In order to answer this question properly, I should say that all the intense class struggle (moreover, the massive anti-Shah front) convinced the imperialists that the Shah's time was over. They finally came around and accepted Khomeni's compromise (and promise) of going to reside in the city of Ghom and not intervene in political matters in Tehran. However that was all a bluff in Khomeni's part. We could say that he was very astute and cheated everyone. That is, he cheated all the discontented

revolutionary movements need. For that matter, in his last lecture at the Tehran University student meeting for the occasion of the "16 of Azar" [December 8th] day of the student movement, Khatami, whose second term in office is coming to an end, was booed, and the students shouted "Khatami: shame on you!" and "You are a traitor!". We should hope that in this round of deep socio-economic crisis and illegitimacy of the whole political establishment the student movement plays its historic role once again.

NEA: And the current situation within the Iranian women's movement?

There is quite a big gap between the student and the women's movement in Iran. Gender equality, and subsequently women's issues, as we all know, is a relatively new phenomena on a world scale, and especially in the so-called "third world" countries. However, Khomeni's Islamic regime has dealt a huge setback for certain social issues (i.e. the loss of abortion rights; the inequality of laws of divorce and child custody; forced Islamic attire). But also in this area, after the war (and because of it) the lack of a qualified workforce ended up to be in the favor of women. They forcefully gained quite a lot of space in civil society. They have waged courageous battles and have won quite a bit. They are now over 60% of university student enrollment. In all areas (science, humanity, art, etc.) their participation is increasing year by year.

Under the fascist regime of the Islamic Republic, Shirin Ebadi, the first Iranian woman lawyer and human rights activist became the first "Muslim woman" to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Her winning of this award, even though politically motivated, put the struggle of the Iranian women (as well as other democratic rights) in the international spot light. It also has pressured the Islamic regime, and will inevitably help the cause of women's struggles for future generations to come.

I am quite optimistic that the Iranian women (like any other country) will play a large part (if not the core) of any movement

ipation of the masses, especially women and youth, has been enormous.

NEA: Over the last few years we have seen an incredible resurgence of the Iranian student movement. The student movement has always played an important role in Iranian revolutionary history. What are your thoughts on the movement and its role in the Iranian struggle?

Well yes, since its inception the student movement has been quite active. As I have already said, most of the revolutionary cadres from the 1950s through the 1970's had risen from this very movement. However after the war with Iraq the Islamic regime tried to silence the role of the student movement with a so called "Cultural Revolution" (i.e. closing the universities for 2-3 years in order to clean up the student assemblies from the radical elements, and by admitting the youth from the families of the "martyrs" of the war without the entrance exam, thereby "Islamizing" the very core of the defeated movement).

It worked for a short while, but through a drop in the quality of the curriculums, and, consequently, the lowering standard of the graduate body, the dialectical reemergence of discontent caused the student movement to again gain momentum. After Khatami came to power in the late '90s, the student movement started to rejuvenate itself. However, liberalism has taken over the radical ideas of the previous decades. Nevertheless, because Khatami has not fulfilled his promises the very same liberal body of student associations is becoming the Achilles heel of the regime. Here we have to recognize that because of its mostly middle class origin the student organizations are never a homogenous movement. A big chunk will always either be for the status quo, or else have a very reformist (academic) agenda at most.

But in the final analysis the small yet very active radical elements have come to bear the theoretical as well as agitational/mobilizational revolutionary role. And here is where we can find the next generation of the "organic intellectual" that any

Iranian masses on one hand, and all the imperialist powers on the other. He not only shoved his plan of the Islamic Republic down our throats, but also antagonized more than ever the whole Middle East region. Khomeini's rhetoric of extending his reign into Iraq (since the majority of the Iraqis are Shia Muslim and Saddam's Baathist regime was Sunni) gave the United States imperialists the excuse to give the green light for Saddam to invade Iran with the hope of getting rid of his regime for one that was more in line with their immediate interests. We should not forget that Khomeini's regime (in Bani Sadre's presidency) constantly bombarded the Kurdish rebellious region, which is the frontier with Iraq, and had already killed many Iraqis.

So the situation was tense at any rate. When the war between Iran and Iraq broke out in late 1980, it gave Khomeini the best weapon to finish the dismantling of all the remaining peoples' movements, and consequently all the leftist organizations in the country. At this point anyone who had the means to escape abroad did so. As a result, a huge anti-Islamic Republic movement flourished in exile. Mojahedin's leadership helped Bani Sadr (The first Iranian president under Khomeini) to escape with them to Paris. They immediately created the first bourgeois opposition to the Islamic Republic called the "National Resistance Council" (NRC).

At this time I had just finished my Masters in the United States and decided to move to Paris for intense political activity. The organization that I was sympathetic to was a small group which had branched out of the OIPFG right after the February 1979 revolution (following the theoretical line of comrade Ahmad Zadeh) known as "Ashraf Dehghani Group". However we officially used the same name (OIPFG) and emblem. The next two and a half years (1981 to late 1983) was the most memorable time ever for me personally in terms of political organizing and agitation. We were the first, among the eight groups, to initiate an all-out radical offensive against the pro-Khomeini

Islamic Falange (which had ties to the Iranian Embassy), who would try to kick us out of the Cite Universite where we would hold our weekly gatherings. They even had the tacit support of the CRS (special French police battalion). We were also the first who brought the issue of the NRC being in the pockets of the imperialists to light, trying to isolate them from the real anti-Islamic Republic and anti-imperialist movement.

NEA: At some point you evolved from a Marxist-Leninist position to anarchist-communism. Could you explain what led to a reassessment of your politics? How did you first come into contact with anarchism? Is there much of a conscious history of anarchism within the Iranian left?

The OIPFG was really an eclectic organization. It claimed to be Marxist (it's socio-economic analysis of the Iranian society in my opinion was, and still is, quite valid) and Leninist, because it believed in the hierarchical organization of the vanguard: the Communist Party (embodying all the other arrogance of Lenin, such as believing that the workers are incapable of developing beyond an economist understanding of the struggle so it needs revolutionary vanguard-a strata outside of the work process to lead the proletariat to revolution). It also included bit of Maoism (the need to create a People's Army) and foco theory, or Guevarism (because we did not have to have a vanguard party at first, as a guerrilla group we could act as a small engine which would in the process give inspiration to the bigger engine, or mass movement, to come along and lead the revolution).

Of course all these different elements were interpreted in the concrete historical situation of Iranian society, and it made sense to me for a long while (1971-1985). For the next few years I lived in South America. At this time I still, with nostalgia, held onto the "glorious path of the fallen comrades" and defended the theoretical contributions that they had made during all those years. Rejecting all the opportunist factions that had done damage to the organization, I felt that something was

at the moment 89% of the population are in the opposition. The survival of the remaining 11% is completely dependent on the regime. In other words, they are in one way or another receiving their salary from the regime.

The European imperialists are now the predominant presence in Tehran. And that of course happened since the taking over of the U.S. embassy by the Islamic students, which resulted in the breaking off of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran. Most of the European capital investment is either in the oil/petrochemical or mining industries, but also in the auto industry, electronics, etc. However, because of the infamous "axis of evil" role that the Iranian regime has been playing in the region (supporting fundamentalist Islamic movements, particularly in Lebanon, and now Iraq) it has forced them to move toward semi-self sufficiency in the making of the light military armaments. The country's connection with the Pakistani nuclear program, as well as other ambitious plans has made a headache for the hegemonic reach of U.S. imperialism in the most volatile region of the world. The Islamic Republic had been taking advantage of the internal rivalry between the imperialist powers up until now. They have good relations with Cuba, which is helping them in the medical field in exchange for oil. They also have invited Chinese capital and expertise in the development of the transportation infrastructure.

So as you can see there is quite a difference between the role of the capital in the two periods. Nevertheless, 85% of the economy is still in the hands of the State. Private investment is small (only some in commerce, and the importation of goods in the light industry and service sectors).

On the last part of the question I should say that because of the change in the historical period (i.e. non-existence of mass movements during the Shah's time to the rise of the consciousness and the involvement of millions of people in all areas of socio-political activity), there has definitely been a change in the political, as well as social and cultural, struggle. The partic-

the West, where there has been this historical precedence for over a century now, we do not see such occurrences either.

NEA: What are the fundamental differences between the organization of Capital under the Imperial regime and under the Islamic Republic? How has the form of struggle changed?

First of all I should remind the reader that the Shah's regime was a puppet one (from 1941-53 to British imperialism, and right after the coup of 1953 through 1979 to U.S. imperialism). After the coup the oil consortium was divided 51% for the United States and 49% for the British imperialist power. There was a permanent military presence by the United States (10-20,000 troops) in Iran.

By 1972, under the Nixon (Kissinger) doctrine, the Shah's regime became the gendarme of the Persian Gulf. That is to say after the Vietnam fiasco the U.S. world strategy had changed for the regionalization of conflict (Low Intensity Conflict). Therefore the role of 'watch dog' was given to the Shah. At one point the Shah sent the Iranian military to crush an uprising by the Marxist guerrillas in Oman. For that purpose the creation of OPEC became an economic and political necessity. The price of oil would go up (a defeat for the Europeans, and a gain for the U.S.) but at the same time the Shah would buy billions of U.S. armaments in exchange. The dumping of other U.S. products [into the Iranian market] was also widespread.

In short, for twenty-four years the economic, political, military, as well as cultural imperialism of the United States was predominant in Iran. The European Imperialists were present, but only on a minor level. However, the coming of the Islamic Republic was through a real revolutionary upheaval; no matter how much it's now hated by the majority of the population.

While the Shah's regime was hated from the very beginning, it took a while (especially in light of eight years of war with Iraq, and the use of the national-chauvinist rhetoric against the Arabs) for the people to realize that the Islamic regime has been the greatest impediment for progressive social change. In Iran

wrong. Since I remained committed to my core communist ideals it occurred to me that it was the organizational type that I increasingly found objectionable. The defeat of the revolution in general (specifically, its democratic aspiration), and the destruction of the Iranian Left (movement of socialist ideals) in particular was very hard to digest.

So in search of answers I re-read a lot of Marx's key texts, and added to the list of my readings the various schools of thought that I had no knowledge up to that point: council communism, autonomist-Marxism, Frankfurt School, and the Situationist International. I also immersed myself into reading many feminist writers, and to boost my spirit I went back to reading novels -- mostly works by South American and European writers.

In 1989 I had made up my mind to go back to school. This way I would get back into the habit of reading more systematically. This time I chose anthropology, and moved to New York City. It was in 1990 that I had my first real encounter with anarchist politics. I joined an anarchist study group, and it did not take long to discover when and how the working class took the wrong turn in its historical struggle for the liberation of humanity. Over the next few years I focused my reading on the works of the major anarchist-communist theorists.

My answer to the last part of this question (whether or not there has ever been a conscious anarchist history in Iran) is a resounding no. There is not much of a conscious history of anarchism within the Iranian left. Worse still, most of the radical Left in exile has since moved to the right, having since become social democrats.

However, inside Iran I have met some free spirited young anarchists. By introducing Nakhdar to this milieu my hope is that we could make a small impact and the next generation will not make the mistakes of the previous ones.

NEA: Do you feel that there is important insight for anarchists to draw from traditional Marxism?

Yes, definitely. I believe that the anarchist thinkers have unfortunately not contributed as much as Marx (and some of the Marxists after him) in the realm of economic theory. For example, Kropotkin has written comparatively little in that respect. Marx still is an important reference for all anti-capitalists. Do not forget that Bakunin was very much influenced by *Das Capital*. For me Marx remains one of the greatest revolutionaries of all time. I would add that there is a consistency in all of his writings. I would not diminish his 'early' writings or separate them from his 'later' work. Of course, I disagree with his political stand against Bakunin in the First International, and all that came after it, but it does not diminish his accomplishments.

I should also add that in my opinion we should separate Marx and Marxism (at least what I understand of it) from Lenin and Leninism. Still, we could learn quite a bit from other Marxist thinkers from the above mentioned school of thoughts. However in the organizational realm we have to rely 100% on anarchist thinking and practice. At least that is where I draw my take on anarchism.

NEA: What is the current political climate in Iran? Do you see potential within any social struggles for anarchism or libertarian communist politics to gain influence?

The current political climate in Iran is terrible. In general there is apathy all over the political spectrum. The reason is that Khatami's presidency (as we had predicted in Nakhdar) was a sham and did not bring any meaningful change. The false hope was that he could 'stand up' to the so-called 'conservative' faction and could bring liberalization of the political atmosphere on the one hand and create more jobs for the youth (who currently represent 65% of the workforce) on the other. He did not accomplish either. Newspapers have been shut down; workers' claims on months of back pay have been ignored, and their daily demonstrations in front of their respected factories are being attacked. Wage increases for teachers and nurses have been postponed, the number of political

prisoners and the torture of students (or any other dissident intellectuals) who dare to raise their voice is on the rise again. Finally, the desperation of the unemployed youth has caused an increase in the drug addiction (currently over two million!) and prostitution in particular. The corruption is skyrocketing, and the decadent lifestyle of a small class (the 'Nuevo Rich') is sickening. And it is becoming increasingly worse, with no progressive alternatives in sight. Consequently the average Iranian is in total despair.

However there has been an attempt, in the last month or so, by a few radical students and some ex-liberals. They published an open letter on the internet asking for the international community to intervene by pressuring the Islamic Republic to hold a referendum for the constitutive assembly. They believe that if they could raise one million signatures-from all Iranians, both inside and outside of Iran-their plan can have a chance to succeed.

I personally do not believe in such a plan. My answer to the last part of your question is -- again unfortunately -- no. The current apathy in general, and the disastrous situation of the working class movements in particular (not to mention the almost non-existence of any radical political organizations), makes me have no such hope. But I am not pessimistic either. I truly believe the liberation of the working class is in its own hands. The situation is very explosive and any moment the masses could rise up spontaneously. And that is where the real alternative would have to be shaped. Nevertheless we have to be realistic.

In Iran we have been living in a political culture that has been nourished in a very authoritarian fashion for thousands of years. The tolerance even within the left has not been huge. It has to be learned. And that takes time. We should know by now that real social change (in a truly radical sense) does not happen over night. It takes generations to be shaped. Even in